Electronics On-line

watching movies on your PC

DVDs on the rise

The modern computer is a true multimedia machine with capacities far exceeding letter writing or the odd game of chess. You can use it to surf the net, play games and watch TV. Using a DVD-ROM drive it is even possible to create a home movie theatre.

Thanks to its colossal storage capacity of up to 17 gigabytes, DVD is a perfect medium for movies and concerts with high picture and sound quality. Meanwhile all popular films and concerts are available on DVD, complete with a choice of subtitling languages, voice-overs and multiple sound channels (like regular PCM and Dolby 1:5).

Unfortunately, DVD players for use at home are still pricey, with entry level players starting at just under £300. That is why many PC owners employ their trusty computer to decode DVD data and display it on the monitor or TV screen. For that purpose, several manufacturers offer complete kits consisting of a DVD-ROM drive and an MPEG decoder card. However, thanks to the huge computing power and data throughput of today's PCs it is very well possible to have these machines perform the decoding in software only. This requires a CPU with a speed of at least 300 MHz. In that case the only additional component you need is a low-end DVD player costing no more than £70 or so.

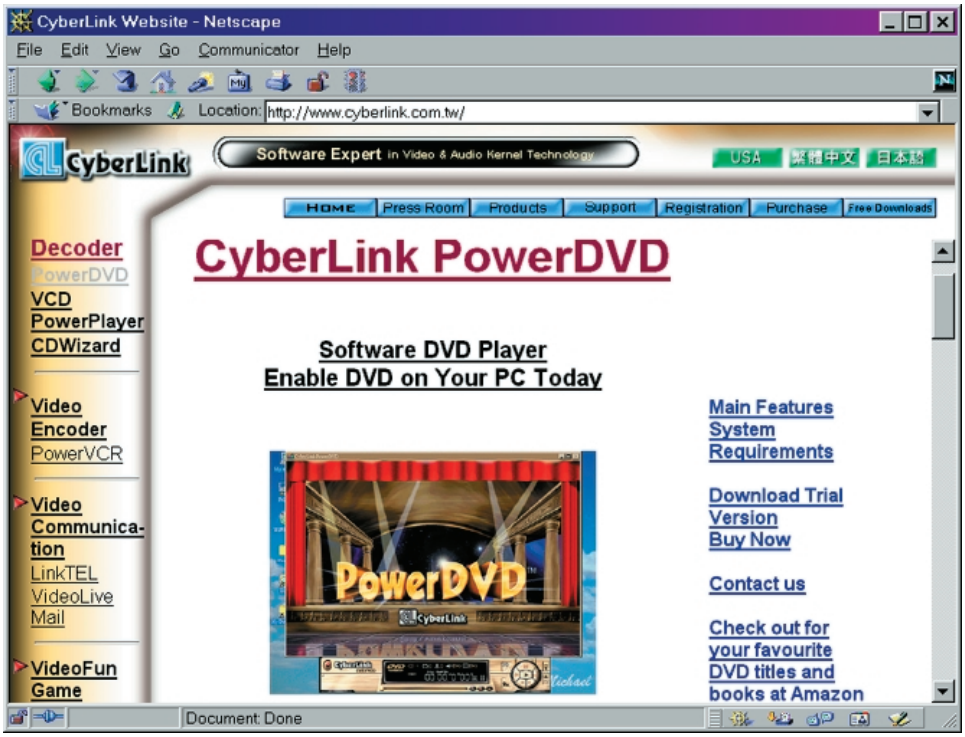
On the Internet, several companies may be found that supply 'software' DVD players. Some also supply a demo version for free downloading. In most cases, the demo is either time restricted or it may be used to watch a short DVD excerpt only.

One of the best software players we've been able to locate is **ATI DVD**, it may be found at *www.atitech.com.uk/showcase/dvd/12faq.html*
This program is only intended for owners of graphics cards from ATI, and may be obtained on CD-ROM using an on-line ordering system.

ATI's DVD player is actually a special version of the **Cinemaster** player from Quadrant (known as Ravisent these days), which works with all brands of graphic card. In principle, this program is only supplied with a new and complete computer system. Updates and so on are however available from the Ravisent web site at *www.qi.com.support/loaddown.html*

Another popular program with a very attractive user interface (an imitation DVD player) is **PowerDVD** thrown at us by Taiwan-based Cyberlink. Their web site at *www.cyberlink.com.tw* has a 30-day demo version available for downloading.

Other programs in the field include **XingDVD** (*www.xingtech.com/video/mpeg/dvd/*), **Win-DVD** from Intervideo (*www.intervideoinc.com*), **DVD Express** from Mediamatics (*www.mediamatics.com/dvdexpress-info.htm*) and **Soft-DVD** from Zoran (*www.zoran.com/softdvd.htm*).

If you do not have a DVD drive but would like to play around with one of the many DVD emulators, then a number of DVD demo files and trailers in the so-called VOB format may be found at *www.poseidon.pspt.fi/vobdvd/*
Mind you, VOB files are… colossal!

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